

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 349 260

SP 033 876

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TITLE Integrating Social Learning Theory with Educating the Deprived.
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Guides - General (050) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Affective Behavior; Developmental Stages; *Disadvantaged Youth; Elementary Education; Family Environment; Guidelines; *Learning Theories; Literature Reviews; *Minority Group Children; Relevance (Education); *Research Needs; School Effectiveness; Social Influences; *Socialization

ABSTRACT

The relevance of major concepts associated with social learning theories for teaching deprived and minority children are reviewed; from these concepts postulates are abstracted which are intended to induce further inquiry and research. The paper describes practical application of social learning theories to education, offering the school a common context through which environment, developmental sequence, and early experiences can be understood and researched. These theories enable educators better to understand how deprived and minority children think and feel about themselves, and to become aware of factors in the environment precipitating cognitive and affective problems that may have some bearing on academic performance. A need exists to conduct empirical studies to determine the degree to which social learning theories impact on the academic performance of minority and deprived children. Eight postulates are outlined to stimulate further inquiry and research. The study of social learning theories enables the school to understand how students' cultures and learning styles can be modified to promote expected learning outcomes. (LL)

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George Taylor

INTEGRATING SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY WITH EDUCATING THE DEPRIVED

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INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades we have witnessed the rediscovery, creation, or the validation of a great diversity of social learning theories. These theories have provided us with a common language with which we can communicate about the affects of social learning theories on academic performance of deprived children.

The study of social learning theories enables the school to better understand both how deprived and minority children think about school related processes and how the children are likely to be feeling about themselves in relation to the process. The school's understanding of both the cognitive and the affective characteristics of deprived children may be termed as "empathic." One way of showing empathy to children is through designing effective classroom environments that considers the cognitive and affect levels of the children (Butler, 1988; Hillard, 1989).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The major emphasis of social learning theories is primarily on environmental learner interaction. The learning of behaviors that are socially accepted, as well as learning which ones are not, is social learning. This view is supported by Stuart (1989). He maintained that social learning theory attempts to describe the process by which we come to know what behaviors should or should not be engaged in when we are in different social situations. The theories themselves are learning theories that have been applied to social situations. These theories have been generally behavioristic rather than cognitive (Bandura, 1977).

The conceptual basis of this research is based upon the social imitation theory of Bandura and Walters (1963). The common threads uniting these theories and concepts are imitation, modeling and copying, and behavior intervention. Deprived and minority children imitate, model and copy behavioral techniques from their environments. These models and techniques are frequently inappropriate for the school environment and create conflict and tension between children and the school. Learning, culture, and behavioral styles of these children should be incorporated and integrated into a total learning packet. Social learning theories also provide a concrete framework for the schools to begin to implement additional social skills strategies into the curriculum.

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Purpose of the Study

This study is designed to review major concepts associated with social learning theories and their relevancies for teaching deprived and minority children, and to abstract from these theories and research findings postulates which are intended to induce further inquiry and research.

Transforming the Environment

Many deprived and minority children live in sub-standard environments where they are denied appropriate mental, physical and social stimulations. These conditions impede normal development in all areas of functioning. Direct and immediate intervention must be made in the social environment of these children if they are to profit sufficiently from their school experiences.

Early Environmental Experiences

Children born in poverty and neglect often suffer from debilitating deprivation that seriously impair their ability to learn. Early prevention programs for these at-risk children and their parents, starting with prenatal care and including health care, quality day care, and preschool education, help prevent learning disabilities and other psychological problems that disrupt later educational efforts (Butler, 1989). A key reason that deprived children have such a high rate of educational failure is that they often lag in physical and psychological development and may be unprepared to meet the demands of academic learning. There is evidence to support that lack of early experiences can affect brain development. Some areas of the brain require adequate stimulation at the right time in order to take on their normal functions. From case studies of deprived children, findings indicate that there may be critical periods for cognitive and language development (Hatch, Thomas, Gardner, and Howard, 1988). Intervention in the early years appears to be the most effective way to improve the prospects for deprived children to receive maximum benefits from their educational experiences.

Impoverishment of a child's early environmental experiences, including any major restrictions on play activities or lack of feedback from older individuals, is suspected of retarding his/her social development and learning. Lack of adequate adult stimulation in the early years can lead to the deprived child's developing negative social behavior which may be irreversible. Firstly, in the absence of adequate stimulation and activity, neurophysiological mechanisms involved in learning may fail to develop. Secondly, conditions in impoverished environments, such as the slums, generally do not provide variety and duration of exposure to perceptual-motor experiences compared to children from more affluent environments.

PL. 99 457 (Part H Infants and Toddlers Program) is designed, in part, to offset some of the above deprivation by assisting states in setting up early intervention programs, for children birth through age 2 who need special services. Early intervention services include the following skills: physical, mental, social and emotional, language and speech, and self-help skills. Special education services may be provided to children age 3 and older who have a special need, such as a physical disability, partial or total loss of sight, severe emotional problems, hearing or speech impairment, mental handicap, or learning disabilities.

Many deprived and minority children will be classified as disabled and will have many of the listed characteristics. Nevertheless, services provided by PL. 99 457 should be extended to deprived and minority children and their families. The key is early intervention, which should be designed to treat, prevent and reduce environmental factors which may impede social growth and development.

Learning Styles

There is no one common definition of learning styles, however, researchers have considered learning styles from four dimensions: cognitive, affective, physiological, and psychological. The cognitive dimension of learning styles refers to the different ways that children mentally perceive and order information and ideas. The affective dimension refers to how students' personality traits--both social and emotional--affect their learning. The physiological dimension involves the senses and the environment. Does the student learn better through auditory, visual, or kinesthetic/tactile means? And how is he/she affected by such factors as light, temperature, and room design? The psychological dimension involves the student's inner strengths and individuality. How does the student feel about himself/herself? What way can be found to build his/her self-esteem (Butler, 1988)?

Hillard's research indicated that educational dialogue in recent years has given substantial attention to the question of the importance and precise meaning of style in teaching and learning, particularly for minority groups. Style differences between teachers and students and between students and the curriculum have been cited as explanations for the low academic performance of some minority groups (Hillard, 1989).

Home and Environmental Conditions

Research reported by Erikson as early as 1959, supported that environments characterized by mistrust, doubt, limitation, feeling of inferiority and powerlessness are environments that contribute to identify confusion and inhibit the development of the mature individual (Erikson, 1959). In support of Erikson's view, Ayer (1989) wrote that children need the home base of family life in

order to grow up healthy and strong. They need to be listened to and understood, nurtured and challenged by caring, committed adults. Parents need to contribute to their children's self-esteem, self-activity or self-control through appropriate modeling strategies.

If a child's early development status and its early home environment are both low, there is an increased likelihood of poor developmental outcomes. The home environment should be where the child receives support, experiences love, and acquires important skills in becoming a productive, happy, sociable and emotional person. The home environment is the foundation for further development within the child. Experiences from the home must be integrated with the school curriculum for meaningful experiences to occur, which will necessitate including the family, and the community in the education process (Kagan, 1989; Bradley, 1989).

Practical Application of Social Learning Theories to Education

Social learning theories offer the school a common context through which environment, development sequence, and early experiences of minority and deprived children development can be understood and researched. These theories enables educators to better understand how deprived children think, how they feel about themselves, and to become aware of factors in the environment precipitating cognitive and affective problems which may have some bearing on academic performance. The relationship between social learning theories and their various concepts toward learning and academic performance of minority and deprived children is not well established. Most research reported today simply indicated that there is a causal relationship. There is a need to conduct empirical studies to determine to what degree social learning theories impact on the academic performance of minority and deprived children. Several postulates have been formulated to stimulate and provide further inquiry and research.

POSTULATE I. Over time individuals tend to develop habitual ways of responding to experiences. Individuals are a product of their environments. They imitate experiences to which they have been exposed. Personality is conceived as a product of social learning. Its development is largely a function of the social conditions under which one grows up. Some social learnings are much more important than others for deprived children. There is frequently a conflict between the social values of deprived children and the school. This is chiefly due to the school not being tolerant of the cultural and behavioral styles of deprived and minority children.

Social skills should be taught to children who need them, and in some instances should supercede academic skills. Appropriate social skills must be taught and modeled for many deprived children

before a meaningful academic program can be pursued. The school should be cognizant of the fact that many of the habits developed by deprived and minority children are well entrenched. Consequently, surface attention will not have a sufficient impact on changing negative habits. A planned coordinated and integrated program will be needed.

POSTULATE II. Style is learned, learned patterns can be either changed or augmented, but can not be ignored. Style tends to be rooted at a deep cultural level and is largely determined by prior experiences and motivation. Misunderstanding of behavioral style can lead to misjudging students' language abilities, intelligence and establishing rapport and communication. Style is directly associated with cultural values and has been changed over a span of time. Modifying style is a slow and arduous process, and may never be fully realized. A proper sensitivity to style can provide a perspective for the enrichment of instruction for all children for the improvement both of teacher-student communication and of the systematic assessment of students. The schools must become more sensitive to style out of basic respect, and for their tremendous potential for learning (Hillard, 1989). Additionally, a person can use more than one style and can be taught to switch styles when appropriate. According to Deal (1990) the core problems of the schools is not technical but spiritual and social. A climate for growth depends upon healthy, fertile social relationships where the styles and experiences of deprived and minority children are recognized. The notion that each culture has made significant contributions to mankind should be highlighted by the school and integrated into the curriculum.

POSTULATE III. Learning depends upon the following factors: drive, response, cue, and reward. The principal theoretical concept drawn from this postulate are reinforcement values and expectations. The primary assumption is that the tendency for behavior to occur in any given situation is a function of the individual's expectations of reinforcement in that situation and of the value of the reinforcements.

Reinforcement values and expectations of minority and deprived children are different than the values expected from the school. What has been successful in the deprived child's environment may be a source of conflict in the school. In essence, these children have frequently been reinforced by what the school may term "negative behaviors." Deprived and minority children historically have responded to behaviors which have brought them success in their environment. The goal driven behaviors, responses to events and the cues, which they have developed are frequently a means of survival in their environments. These behaviors work well for them, until they attend school. At school the copying and imitative tendencies learned at home by deprived children are generally not tolerated or accepted by the school, causing frustration, poor self-image, and sometimes aggressive behavior.

It is incumbent upon the school to recognize and accept this fact and to develop strategies to modify, adapt, and gradually promote, what is considered to be "appropriate social behavior" through the use of behavior intervention techniques and other strategies.

POSTULATE IV. Children receive and order information different and through a variety of dimensions and channels. Diggory (1990) implied that the school is not sensitive to the various personal learning styles that pupils have developed and mastered during the developmental stages. Making sense out of the world is a very real and activity process. During early childhood children master complex tasks according to their own schedules and without formal training or intervention.

Upon entering school, children are regimented and required to follow specific school rules, which often conflicts with their styles and modes of learning. Diggory (1990) further outlined that the child and school conceive learning differently. The school is mostly concerned with verbal and written expressions and standardized test results. Accordingly, many of these activities are strange to children and many have not developed sufficient background or skills to master them. If the school is to be successful in meeting the needs of children, especially those from diverse backgrounds, deprived children must be given an activity role in their own learning by structuring activities which are relevant and meaning to them. Additionally, teachers must be free to experiment with various models of instruction.

The role of the school should not be to fill children with information, but to help them construct understanding about what they are doing. Children's competence, their ability to make meaning from their environment to construct knowledge, to form generalizations, to solve problems and to associate and transfer knowledge is seldom encouraged by the school.

The concept that style requires a pedagogical response, especially at the point of applying special teaching strategies, appears to be a sound approach. It is widely believed that such an approach ought to be attempted and that when they are made, teaching and learning will be more successful.

Some children are concrete learners while others are abstract learners, others focus on global aspects of the problem while others focus on specific points. Ideally, a student should be flexible enough to do both. Since schools traditionally give more weight to analytical approaches than to holistic approaches, the student who does not manifest analytical habits is at a decided disadvantage (Hillard, 1989).

POSTULATE VI. Early intervention and parental involvement are essential for preparing deprived children to master school tasks successfully. There has been strong support from the Federal government to include the family in the early educational process of the handicapped child. The passage of the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986 (P.L. 99-457) established guidelines for the relationship among federal, state and local education agencies to provide professional resources to handicapped children and their families. The federal government created guidelines for the educational community in developing and implementing a comprehensive, coordinate, multidisciplinary, interagency program of early intervention services for infants, toddlers and their families (Gallagher, 1989).

A significant percentage of deprived children may be classified as disabled, or have handicapping conditions so severe that they will meet the guidelines specified for services under P.L. 99-457. Generally, deprived children live in sub-environments which stifle growth and development. P.L. 99-457 will allow many deprived children to receive services early, thus preventing or eradicating many of the handicapping conditions which will manifest themselves later.

POSTULATE VII. Individuals in mismatched environments often leave the environment or become less productive in it. Individuals are influenced by the elements within their environments. An individual who lives in an environment that is a good match for his needs and abilities will likely be more productive and prone to stay and will achieve academically. Individuals in mismatched environments, such as deprived children often have trouble transferring values from one environment to another; therefore, many leave school when they reach the legal age. Deprived children, as well as all children, do a great deal of learning outside of the classroom. They have accomplished a vast amount of non-academic learning before they enter school, and continue to learn non-academic sources while they are enrolled. Historically, the schools have not tapped this great learning resource. Values, styles, and concepts that deprived and minority children bring to the schools must be matched and integrated into their own social reality if school experiences are to be meaningful.

POSTULATE VIII. Most learning is social and is mediated by other people, consequently children should work in groups as much as possible. There are many group experiences designed to promote social growth among and between children. one of the most promising techniques is cooperative learning. It appears to be a promising technique for improving the social skills of deprived children. Cooperative learning promotes:

1. Positive interdependence
2. Face to face interaction
3. Individual accountability

4. Interpersonal and small group skills
5. Group processing (Johnson and Johnson, 1990; Kagan, 1990 and Schultz, 1990).

Most deprived children do not meet academic success, due partly, to their inability to implement the above social skills or techniques. These techniques are designed to reduce student isolation and increase students' abilities to react and work with other students toward the solution of common problems. The school should experiment with various forms of cooperative learning strategies to improve social skills of deprived and minority children.

CONCLUSIONS

The impact of personality temperament, cognitive styles, sociological influences, and ethnic background may all influence development and learning of minority and deprived children. The study of social learning theories enables the school to both understand how these students' cultures and learning styles can be modified to promote expected learning outcomes, as well as how these students feel about themselves in relationship to learning. This understanding of matching the cognitive and affective process in designing learning experiences of minority and deprived children appear to be realistic and achievable within the school.

Deprived and minority children generally differ from their counterparts not only in cognitive functioning, but also in interaction to other people. Their abilities to function satisfactory in social groups, and in dispositions, habits, and attitudes customarily associated with character and personality are usually below expected levels. They have fewer and less rigid controls over their impulses and have learned hostile and destructive patterns of behavior. Deprived children often seem unable to respond to classroom instruction. Growing up poor, many of them seem unable to learn the skills and attitudes that they must have in order to escape from poverty. The majority of them never will become fully integrated unless early intervention is attempted (Matsueda, 1987). Intervention should begin early and cover all aspects of human behavior as well as support services. Services provided for handicapped children, under P.L. 99-457 (Part H Infants and Toddlers Program) should be extended to minority and deprived children and their families.

Some observations that are relevant to minority and deprived children:

1. Seem generally unaware of the "ground rules" for success in school.
2. Are less able to learn from being told than are their counterparts.

3. Are often unable to make simple symbolic interpretations.
4. Tend to have shorter attention spans, consequently have problems in following directions.
5. Are unable to use language in a flexible way.
6. Tend to have little concept of relative size of objects outside of their environments.
7. Are less likely to perceive adults as people to whom they can turn for help.
8. Seem to have a low level of curiosity about things.
9. Seem to project a low self image.
10. Have experiences within a very narrow range.

The difficult part of teaching is not developing appropriate learning strategies for minority and deprived children, but dealing with the great influx of children who come from emotionally, physically, socially and financially stressed homes. This is not a school problem alone, society in general must assume the major responsibility for these environmental atrocities. The school is responsible to the extent that it has not changed its approach to teaching minority and deprived children over the last several decades, in spite of the vast amount of research and literature on innovated teaching techniques and strategies successfully employed. School experiences for minority and deprived children are usually unrelated to the experiences they bring to school and do not adequately address the aforementioned observations outlined. Life in school is mostly teacher centered-textbook-dominated, restrictive, impersonal, and rigid (Goodlad, 1984).

These issues and more must be addressed by the school if it is to become responsive to the educational needs of minority and deprived children. The position advanced by the Committee for Economic Development (1987) stated that, "for imperative moral and practical reasons, then, our commitment to the young must go beyond political rhetoric; it must produce a well planned continuum of programs for children from birth through adulthood." This statement appears to be appropriate for the school to promote in providing equal education opportunities for all children, including minority and deprived.

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